#16

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A Dissertation on the Nature History and Treatment of Hepatitis

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An Inaugural Essay

Nothing but the imperious necessity of preparing a dissertation on some medical subject, previously to obtaining the degree of Doctor of Medicine, could have induced me to appear before you in the character of an author; but in obedience to the laws of this University, of which I have the honour to be a Student, I have thrown together a few hasty remarks on the nature, history, and treatment of Hepatitis. On such an occasion nothing new, profound, or highly polished can be expected from one, who has as yet acquired but little from observation or experience.

Nature and History of Hepatitis

Hepatitis or inflammation of the liver, is a disease of Southern rather than of Northern climates, and of a low and flat, rather than of a high and hilly country.

It may be expected in all places where bilious fever is a prevailing malady. Hence, it is frequently found in the miasmatic sections of the Southern States, particularly the Carolinas and Georgia, and the whole range of the West India Islands. It is said to be still more frequent in the British provinces, in India. There it would appear to be a real endemic almost as much, as the intermittent fever in certain sections of the United States. It is a disease much to be dreaded throughout the world especially in low, flat, and marshy countries.

Hepatitis is chiefly confined to adults; children, and those under the age of puberty being rarely affected with it, at least in the United States. It attacks females as well as males, and intemperate persons ~~persons~~ are particularly liable to its ravages, a

drunkard in the torrid zone rarely escapes this disease.

Hepatitis has been ~~xxx~~ divided by systematic writers into two kinds, acute, and chronic. It is ranked, by Professor Chapman, under the secretory system. I shall confine myself in the following observations to the acute form of this disease; which is violent in its nature and rapid in its progress.

Symptoms

Acute Hepatitis is frequently preceded by an affection of the Stomach. This for the most part, is so inconsiderable as not to create alarm; or to excite much uneasiness. Its formal attack is ushered in with a sense of chilliness, succeeded by pain in the right hypochondrium extending to the clavicle and shoulder; the pain being

sometimes sharp at others dull. The pain occasioned by Hepatitis is increased by pressure upon the region of the liver, and is accompanied with a cough; difficulty of breathing and great uneasiness by lying on the left side. This is sometimes the case with the right side also, and the patient is obliged to lie on his back; afflicted with nausea and sickness, and often with a vomiting of bilious matter; the tongue is covered with a yellowish fur; the patient complains of loss of appetite, and great thirst; the pulse is strong hard and frequent; the skin hot and dry; the bowels generally constipated, at times, very obstinately so. (Occasionally however the reverse is the case,) The urine is high coloured, depositing a yellowish sediment; and when the disease has continued for some time, the skin and eyes assume a yellowish tint.

When great difficulty of breathing prevails

attended with sharp lancinating pain in the commencement, resembling that of Pleurisy, the disease originates in the membranes covering the liver. But if the pain is dull the parenchyma of the liver is principally affected, and is more liable to run into Suppuration.

Termination.

Hepatitis terminates in resolution, adhesion, suppuration, ulceration or effusion. Resolution and adhesion are the most favourable terminations of Hepatitis, and generally take place where the proper remedies have been administered in time. Suppuration, having taken place, a communication, in most instances, is effected between the intestines and ~~biliary~~ liver, or between the abscess and biliary ducts, through which the matter passes

into the intestines, and is discharged by stool. In some cases an ulcerated opening is established between the liver and diaphragm, and the pus is discharged into the chest, or coughed up from the lungs. By whatever vent the matter escapes, whether through ~~through~~ the abdominal muscles or by the internal passages, it generally happens that through the medium of the adhesive process it is enclosed in a cyst, and so the adjoining parts are secured from danger. Sometimes however, effusion takes place, from rupture, and the patient dies.

Of the Causes producing Hepatitis

Hepatitis may arise from any cause inducing a strong irritation in the liver, either directly, or through the medium of sympathy. In speaking of the causes

producing Hepatitis directly; a contusion on the region of the liver, from blows, falls, or inordinate pressure, ought to be mentioned first, together with gunshot wounds, and those produced by cutting and piercing instruments as well as laceration of the liver from other causes. There have been instances in which worms produced inflammation in this organ; and suppuration having taken place, the greater part of the liver has been destroyed.

The causes which excite Hepatitis by sympathy, appear to be numerous. They make their first impression on some other part of the body; as for instance, the stomach, skin and head; which being transfered to the liver by consent of parts produce Hepatitis. In enumerating the causes by which the liver is affected through the medium of the stomach; ~~it must~~ I shall

mention marsh effluvium as the most common; it being well known, that in most intermittent, and remittent fevers, the liver is very sensibly affected. The irritation in these maladies may certainly be traced to the stomach; and on that organ the primary impression is made; and that impression being communicated by sympathy to the liver produces Hepatitis. Dr Mac. It would be superfluous to mention other poisons, as their modus operandi must proceed in a similar manner; therefore, I shall pass them over unnoticed.

Cold is the cause of almost all the diseases in hot climates. We think therefore that when the pores have been excessively opened by the extreme heat of a vertical sun, perspiratory and biliary secretion must be much increased; and

the body being suddenly exposed to a strong current of cool air perspiration must of course be quickly checked, and the liver being known to be easily affected; Hepatitis is apt to take place.

Again, the increased action of the perspiratory, and vicary vessels, occasions a loss of tone in them, by which their fluids continue to be poured out, after the cause has ceased to operate. Under these circumstances it happens that the application of the slightest degree of cold is productive of danger. Not only is the animal heat too rapidly abstracted, but the extreme vessels on the surface, are rendered torpid, the perspiratory and biliary secretions are arrested; the passage of the blood through the liver is obstructed; and a temporary congestion throughout the portal circle is the result.

It is mentioned by a writer of the highest

authority ~~shewed~~ that injuries of the head have produced Hepatitis. And to his writings I must refer you.

Diagnosis

As Hepatitis is liable to be mistaken for Peripneumonia, care must be taken to distinguish them. This may be easily done by observing that in Hepatitis the pain in the side is less acute, and extending to the top of the shoulder, the difficulty of respiration is not so great, the cough more dry, and the functions of the stomach more deranged. There is also in Hepatitis a yellowish tint of the eyes & a change of colour in the skin which are not so observable in Peripneumonia.

It may be easily distinguished from Gastritis by observing the great prostration & tender the smallness of the pulse, the case excitement is considerable and the burning sensation

in the stomach in Gastritis. Moreover the dragging sensation, which is most commonly felt in Hepatitis and the uneasiness complained of by the patient whilst lying on his side, will sufficiently distinguish these diseases.

Prognosis

The subsidence of the pyrexial symptoms, the complexion gaining its natural aspect, the strength not much impaired, return of appetite and the different functions of the body returning to their wonted offices may be considered favourable.

But continuance of pain and fever with obstinate constipation are indicative of an increase of the disease. Severe rigours succeeded by flushes of heat and hectic fever denote suppuration: continued hiccup, cold extremities, with a sinking pulse indicate dissolution.

Treatment

Acute Hepatitis, requires for its cure, the antiphlogistic mode of treatment, promptly pursued. Blood must be copiously taken in a given time, to an extent not common and scarcely warranted in other diseases. Twenty or thirty ounces may be drawn off from the arm at once; and the operation repeated according to the circumstances, and habits of the patient. Cups or leeches, or both should be liberally applied to the region of the liver; and a large blister laid on the same as soon as the febrile action is sufficiently subdued. Simultaneous with these remedies, let copious and repeated purging be used; Mercurial purges quickened in their action by jalap; are highly useful. With these, saline purges aught to be occasionally alternated; such as a strong infusion of senna containing

Glauber or Epsom salts in solution. After the inflammatory action has been sufficiently reduced, it will be the safest practice, to remove the disease by a gentle mercurial ptyalism to be continued for some time. Should the calomel act as a cathartic, let it be combined with Opium.

The Nitric Acid and the expressed juice of the Dandelion have been spoken of in high terms. They are particularly recommended in those cases attended with great irritability of the stomach, the calomel running off by stool.

In the mean time let perfect quietude be enjoined, and all the drinks be bland and diluting, such as barley water, flaxseed tea, toast and water &c. They may, however, be impregnated with vegetable acids. Let every thing heating be avoided, such as animal food in broth or otherwise.

Should suppuration take place and the abscess point externally the matter may be let out with a common lancet bistory or trocar. When the matter has found its way into the chest, let it be discharged through the intercostal muscles by an operation, and the external wound be healed as soon as the discharge has so far diminished, as to render its reproduction improbable After the discharge of the matter, the patients strength should be supported by tonics and a good diet. The patient should be protected by appropriate clothing.